

6 Intellectual Influence of Celtic Monks.

Empire, did not press into its service the old classic culture, as she did the old imperial organisation. What we call a liberal education was suspected and discredited by pope and bishop. It was eschewed by the monks and clerics who taught in the cathedral and monastic schools that displaced the older educational institutions. Pagan poetry, pagan philosophy, were banned as dangerous to the faith.

From the fifth century onwards "the hostility of the Church towards letters," to quote Mr Poole, "is nearly universal." To Gregory the Great the treasures of the classic authors were "the idle vanities of secular learning," from which he exhorted the bishop of Vienna, who had ventured to expound "grammar" to his friends, to keep himself undefiled. It was only in Ireland and Iona that the Celtic monks combined the study of Latin, Greek, and even Hebrew, with that of theology, and these Scottish monks, to whom the spirit of wandering, as we learn from the "Life of St Gall," was a second nature, exerted themselves to keep burning the torch of classic learning as well as Christian teaching, as missionaries in Britain, Gaul, Germany, Switzerland, and even Italy. The imaginative, responsive nature of the Celt revelled in the poetry of Greece and Rome, as in the songs of the native bards. In their track the light of learning as well as of monkish piety brightened the barbarian darkness of Western and Central Europe, for an interval, before the advent of Charlemagne—a fact overlooked by Professor Giesebricht when he tells us that after the end of the sixth century "the most fearful barbarism, whose darkness is relieved by no spark of the higher intellectual life, reigned throughout the West." On the contrary, it was just towards the end of the sixth century that these wandering Scottish monks began their mission as preachers and teachers, which embraced so large a part of the western empire. What they did for the cultivation of letters in the Anglic church of Northumbria is evidenced by the erudition of a Baeda, and other English scholars who owed, directly or indirectly, much to the monastic schools of Ireland. The missionaries from Rome to Anglo-Saxon Britain likewise founded schools, and contributed their share to the spread of Christianity and education among the Anglo-Saxons? From these schools, too, such as those of York, Jarrow, Wearmouth, a new missionary and educational movement radiated its light